

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2009

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 5450

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, PINT, HO

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF MILITARY PROMOTIONS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 5142

BEGIN SUMMARY: CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR AND TWO OTHER COLONELS WERE PROMOTED TO THE RANK OF BRIGADIER GENERAL IN A CEREMONY ON DECEMBER 21. THERE WERE NO PROMOTIONS TO COLONEL OR LIEUTENANT COLONEL. THE PROMOTIONS REPRESENT A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN MELGAR'S CONDUCT OF THE GOVERNMENT BY THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL, AND A SIGN THAT MELGAR IS FURTHER STRENGTHENING HIS BASE OF SUPPORT IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A CEREMONY ON DECEMBER 21 A NEW PROMOTION LIST WAS ANNOUNCED. CHIEF OF STATE JUAN ALBERTO MELGAR CASTRO, CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES POLICARPO PAZ GARCIA AND MINISTER OF DEFENSE MARIO CHINCHILLA CARCAMO WERE PROMOTED TO THE RANK OF BRIGADIER GENERAL. THERE WERE NO PROMOTIONS TO COLONEL OR LIEUTENANT COLONEL. ONLY EIGHT CAPTAINS WERE PROMOTED
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TO MAJOR, WHILE THE REST OF THE PROMOTIONS WERE TO CAPTAIN

AND FIRST OR SECOND LIEUTENANT.

2. COMMENT: AS POINTED OUT IN REFTTEL, MELGAR HAS BEEN TAKING CAREFULLY MEASURED STEPS TO STRENGTHEN HIS POSITION IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. HIS ELEVATION TO THE GRADE OF BRIGADIER GENERAL TOOK PLACE AFTER THE RECENT CONCLUSION OF A THREE DAY MEETING OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (SDC). ONE OF THE MAJOR MATTERS CONSIDERED IN THE MEETING WAS THE NEW PROMOTION LIST. THE NAMING OF MELGAR AND PAZ AS GENERALS IS A CLEAR SIGN OF BOTH HAVING RECEIVED THE SUPPORT OF THE SDC IN THEIR DIRECTION OF THE COUNTRY AND THE ARMED FORCES. THEREFORE, MELGAR HAS EMERGED FROM THE SITUATION WITH INCREASED POWERS OF DECISION AND EXECUTION IN GOVERNING HONDURAS. THE NAMING OF CHINCHILLA AS GENERAL, EVEN THOUGH HE IS NOT AN INFLUENTIAL MEMBER OF THE SDC, CAN BE UNDERSTOOD AS A DESIRE TO GIVE THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE A RANK TO ENABLE HIM TO DEAL WITH OTHER NATIONAL MINISTERS OF DEFENSE ON AN EQUAL BASIS. THE LACK OF PROMOTIONS TO COLONEL AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL MUST BE CONSIDERED IN THE LIGHT OF THE BALANCE OF POWER WITHIN THE SDC. OUT OF THE 27-MAN COUNCIL, 24 ARE LIEUTENANT COLONELS AND THE PROMOTION OF ANY ONE OR OF SEVERAL WOULD HAVE RAISED THE PROBLEM OF POWER RELATIONSHIPS. SUCH A SITUATION COULD LEAD TO A CLAFP INVOLVING THE DEFINITION OF WHAT GROUP OR GROUPS ARE "FIRST AMONGST EQUALS," A CONFRONTATION THAT THE LIEUTENANT COLONELS HAVE TRIED TO AVOID. A SIMILAR SITUATION EXISTS IN RELATION TO PROMOTION TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL, THAT IS, PROMOTIONS TO THAT RANK WOULD HAVE UPSET THE "STATUS QUO" THAT PRESENTLY EXISTS IN THE SDC. THEREFORE, PROMOTIONS TO THE TWO GRADES WERE OMITTED ALTOGETHER. PUBLIC REACTION TO THE PROMOTIONS HAS BEEN NOTABLE FOR ITS LACK OF ENTHUSIASM.
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